

FIG. 1

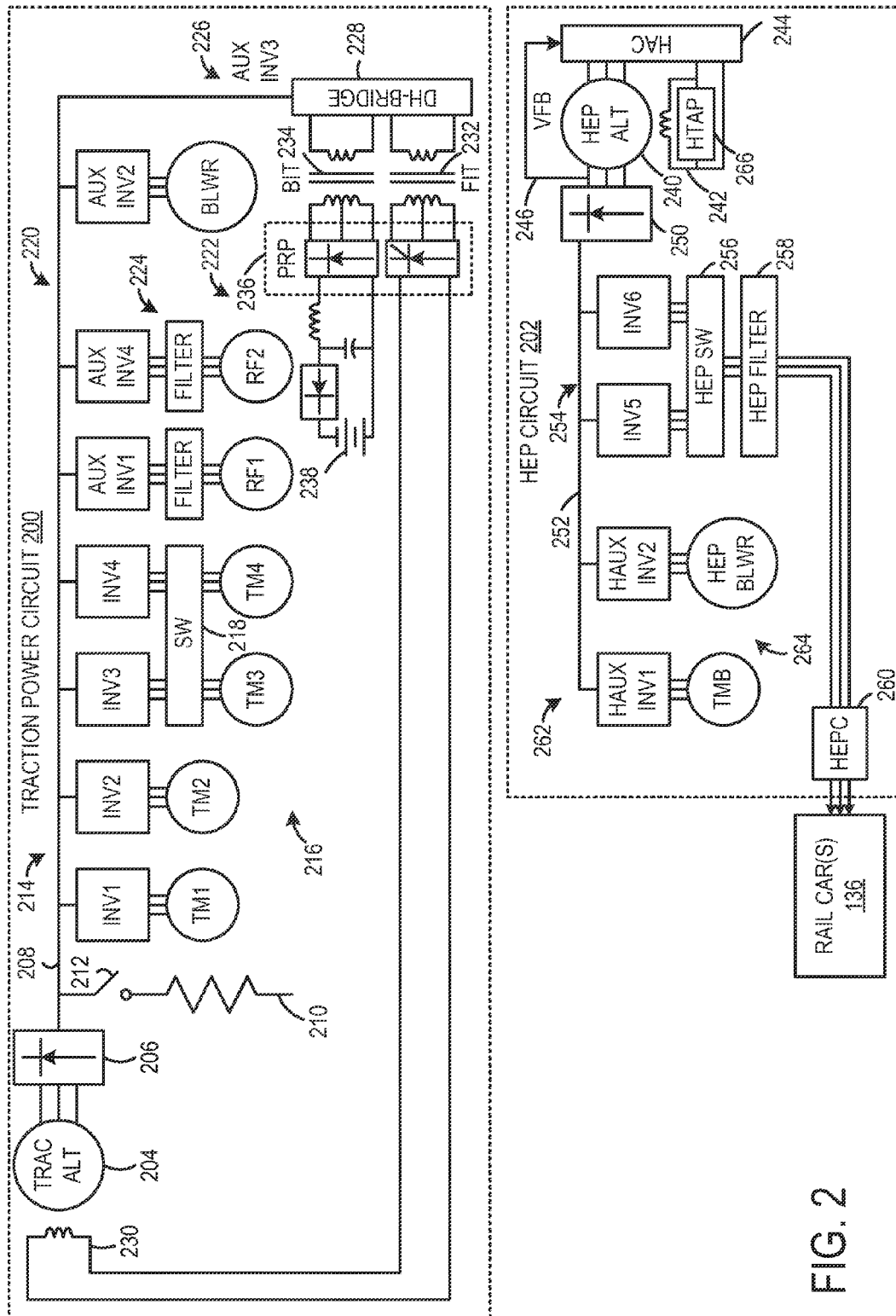


FIG. 2

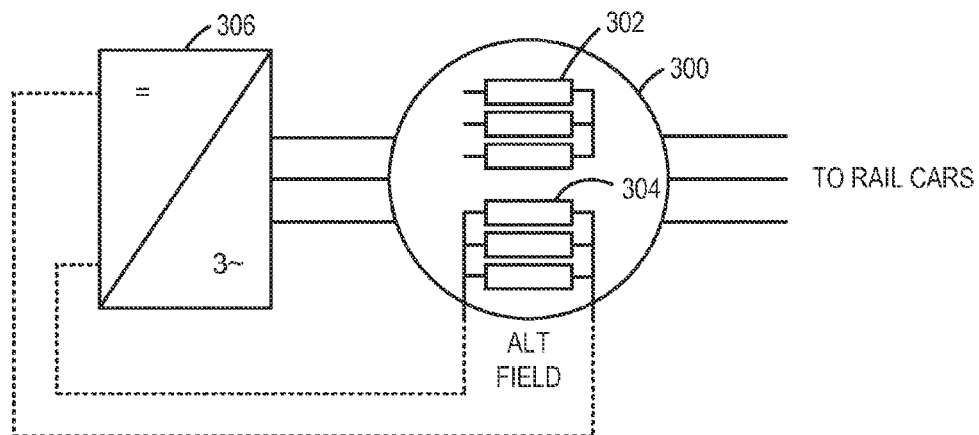


FIG. 3

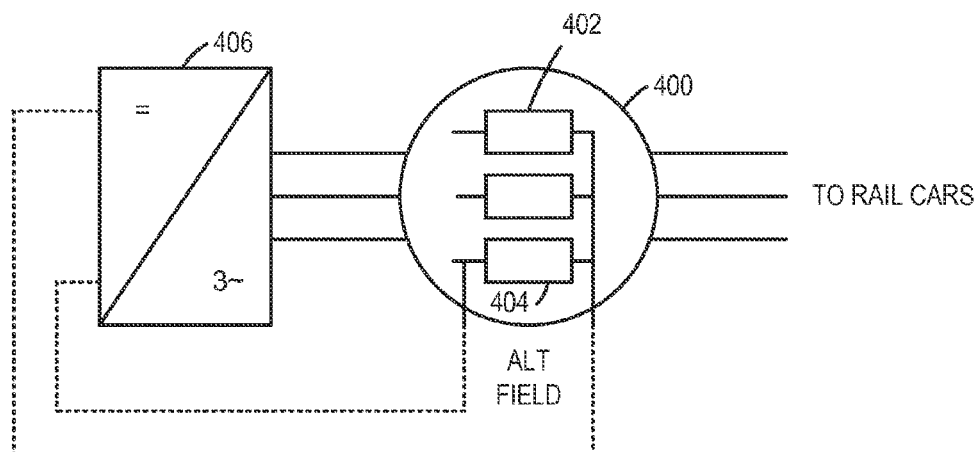


FIG. 4

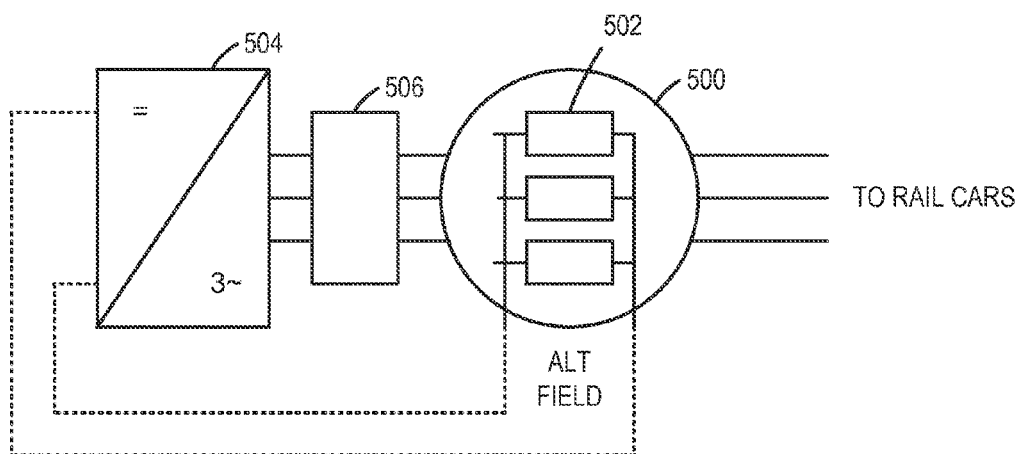


FIG. 5

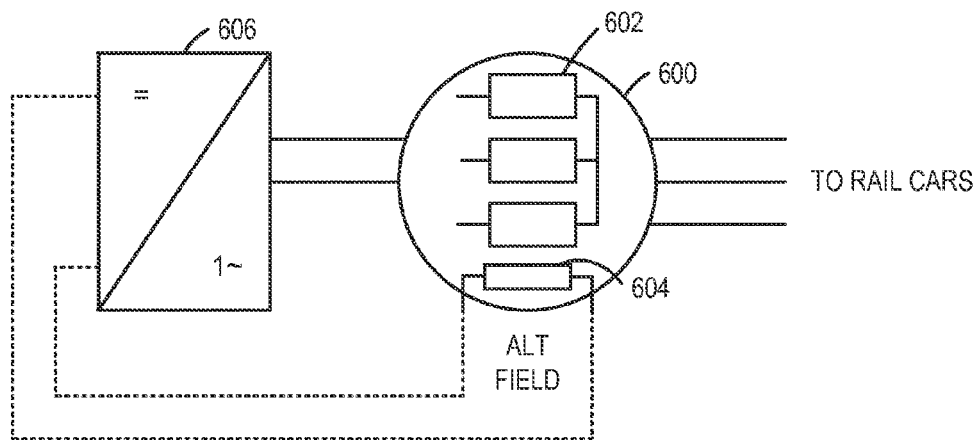


FIG. 6

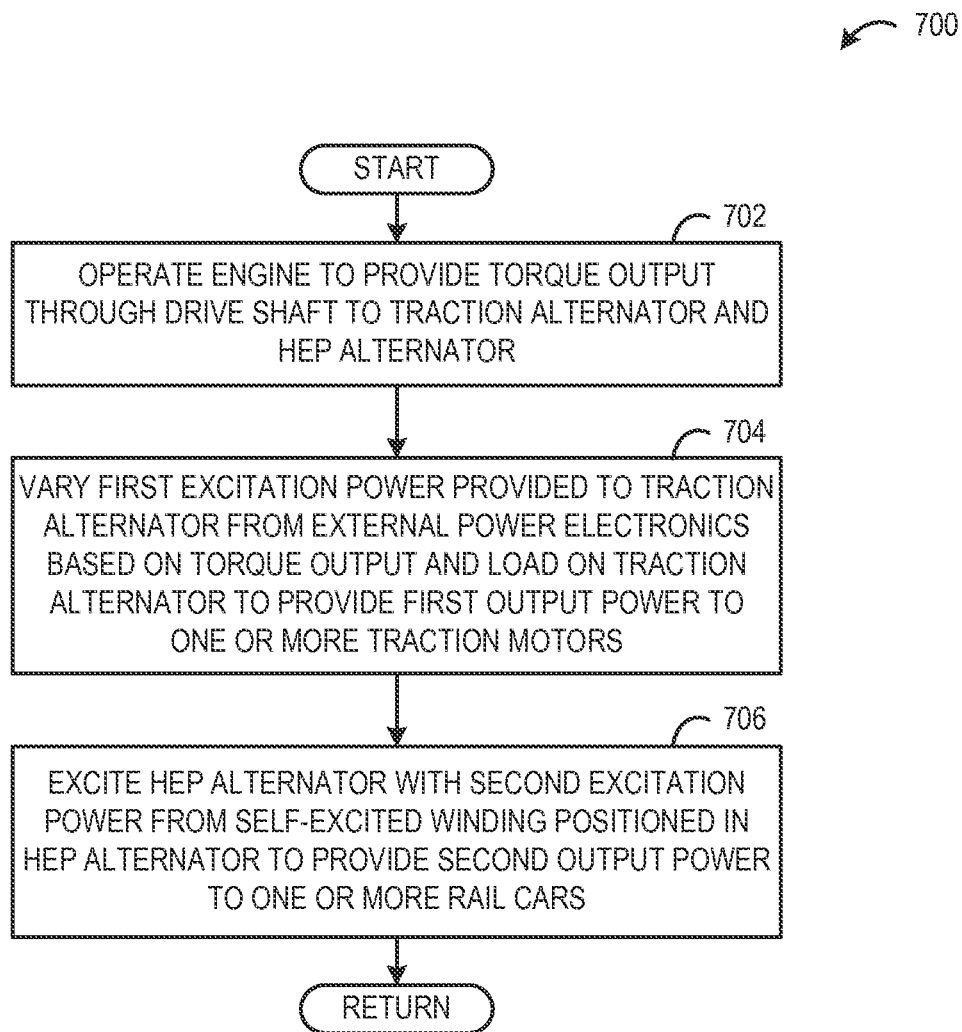


FIG. 7

1

SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR GENERATING POWER IN A VEHICLE

FIELD

Embodiments of the subject matter disclosed herein relate to systems and methods for generating electrical power in a vehicle.

BACKGROUND

In some trains, electrical power may be generated at one vehicle in the train and distributed to other vehicles of the train. For example, a locomotive or a generator car may include an alternator, referred to as a head-end-power (HEP) alternator, that distributes electrical power to other cars in the train. In a passenger train for example, the electrical power generated by a HEP alternator may be distributed to passenger cars for lighting, electrical, and other hotel needs of passengers. In one example, a HEP alternator in a rail vehicle is excited by power electronics (e.g., including a battery, permanent magnets, driver circuits) that are externally positioned from the HEP alternator in the rail vehicle.

In some cases, the external power electronics that provide excitation to the HEP alternator add additional overhead to a rail vehicle. For example, the external power electronics can increase the overall cost and weight of the rail vehicle. As another example, the external power electronics may require cooling by a cooling system. The cooling system increases fuel consumption of the rail vehicle, since additional fuel is burned to generate electrical power to operate the cooling system.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

In one embodiment, a vehicle system includes an electrical power generation unit operatively coupled with a drive shaft of an engine. The electrical power generation unit includes a traction alternator and a head-end-power (HEP) alternator. The traction alternator is excited by power electronics positioned external to the traction alternator. The HEP alternator is self-excited by an exciter winding positioned in the HEP alternator.

By employing a self-excited HEP alternator, external power electronics that would otherwise be required to excite the alternator may be eliminated from the rail vehicle. In this way, the HEP system may be made more compact and light weight relative to a configuration where a HEP alternator is excited by external power electronics.

It should be understood that the brief description above is provided to introduce in simplified form a selection of concepts that are further described in the detailed description. It is not meant to identify key or essential features of the claimed subject matter, the scope of which is defined uniquely by the claims that follow the detailed description. Furthermore, the claimed subject matter is not limited to implementations that solve any disadvantages noted above or in any part of this disclosure.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention will be better understood from reading the following description of non-limiting embodiments, with reference to the attached drawings, wherein below:

FIG. 1 shows a schematic diagram of an example of a rail vehicle according to an embodiment of the present disclosure.

2

FIG. 2 shows a schematic diagram of an embodiment of a traction power circuit and a head-end-power (HEP) circuit.

FIGS. 3-6 show different embodiments of a self-excited HEP alternator that may be employed in a HEP circuit according to the present disclosure.

FIG. 7 shows a flow chart of an embodiment of a method for controlling a HEP electrical system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

A train or other rail vehicle consist may include a plurality of rail vehicles interconnected with one another. (Generally, a consist is a group of vehicles that are mechanically linked to travel together along a route.) In some examples, one rail vehicle may generate electrical power and transmit the electrical power to other rail vehicles in the train. The present description relates to various embodiments of systems and methods for generating such electrical power in a rail vehicle. More particularly, the present description relates to a head-end-power or hotel-electric-power (HEP) alternator in a rail vehicle that is self-excited by a field winding positioned in the HEP alternator to provide electrical power to one or more other rail vehicles (such as rail cars) of a train or other rail vehicle consist. As used herein, a HEP alternator refers to an alternator that generates electrical power in a first rail vehicle that is transmitted to, and consumed by, electrical loads positioned in other rail vehicles that are mechanically coupled to, either directly or indirectly, the first rail vehicle in a train or other rail vehicle consist.

In one example, the field winding may be employed in the HEP alternator for excitation because the HEP alternator outputs a substantially constant electrical power output level to the rail cars (e.g., varying within less than 5% to 10% of the average power level). Since the electric power level is substantially constant, nominal control may be used to handle operation of the HEP alternator. By employing a self-excited HEP alternator, external power electronics that would otherwise excite the alternator may be eliminated from the rail vehicle, if desired. In this way, the HEP system may be made more compact and light weight relative to a configuration where a HEP alternator is excited by external power electronics.

In some embodiments, a traction alternator is coupled to a drive shaft of an engine and the HEP alternator is coupled to the drive shaft such that both alternators convert torque output from the engine into electrical power, with both alternators optionally housed in a common housing. The operation of the HEP alternator may be contrasted with a traction alternator, where the power output of the traction alternator varies significantly during operation depending on the traction motor requirements for driving the rail vehicle. Specifically, the traction alternator provides electrical power to one or more traction motors of the rail vehicle and the HEP alternator provides electrical power to one or more rail cars of the rail vehicle. The electrical power provided by the traction alternator may vary based on the changes in load (e.g., traction motor speed). On the other hand, as noted above, the HEP alternator may output a substantially constant electrical power output level.

FIG. 1 schematically shows an embodiment of a vehicle system **100**, herein depicted as a rail vehicle, configured to run on a rail **102** using a plurality of wheels **104**. In one example, the rail vehicle **100** is a locomotive. In another example, the rail vehicle **100** is a generator car that is not a locomotive. In one example, the vehicle system **100** may be coupled to a plurality of rail cars **136** that are connected to form a train. In one example, the train may be a passenger

train that includes one or more locomotives coupled to one or more passenger cars. The rail vehicle **100** includes an engine system **106**. The engine system **106** may be operable to generate electrical power for distribution to various components, modules, cars, etc. that may be remotely located from the engine system **106**.

In one example, the rail vehicle **100** is a diesel-electric vehicle. For example, the engine system **106** includes a diesel engine **108** that generates a torque output on a drive shaft **112** that is transmitted to an electrical power generation unit **114**. In some embodiments, the engine **108** is a four-stroke engine in which each of the cylinders fires in a firing order during two revolutions of the drive shaft **112**. In other embodiments, the engine **108** is a two-stroke engine in which each of the cylinders fires in a firing order during one revolution of the drive shaft **112**.

The electrical power generation unit **114** produces electrical power that is applied for subsequent propagation to a variety of downstream electrical components. The electrical power generation unit **114** includes a traction alternator **116** and a HEP alternator **118**. In other embodiments, the electrical power generation unit **114** may additionally include an auxiliary alternator **120**. As described herein, the alternators of the electrical power generation unit **114** may also be referred to individually as power distribution units, power systems, or power circuits. Each of the traction alternator **116**, the HEP alternator **118**, and the auxiliary alternator **120** (if present) are coupled to the drive shaft **112** to convert torque output from the engine **108** into electrical power to be distributed to various components.

In the illustrated embodiment, the traction alternator **116**, the HEP alternator **118**, and the auxiliary alternator **120** are positioned in the same physical housing of the electrical power generation unit **114**. However, it will be appreciated that in some embodiments, one or more of the alternators may be located elsewhere in the rail vehicle. For example, in some embodiments, the engine system of the rail vehicle may include a second engine and one or more of the alternators may be coupled to a drive shaft of the second engine.

The traction alternator **116** provides electrical power to a plurality of traction motors **110**. As depicted, the plurality of traction motors **110** are each connected to one of a plurality of wheels **104** to provide tractive power to propel the rail vehicle **100**. One example of a rail vehicle configuration includes one traction motor per wheel pair (axle). As depicted herein, six traction motors correspond to each of six pairs of wheels of the rail vehicle. The traction alternator **116** and associated electronic components will be discussed in further detail below with reference to FIG. 2.

The HEP alternator **118** provides electrical power to a plurality of rail cars **136** coupled to the rail vehicle **100** through a contactor **122**. In one example, the plurality of rail cars includes unpowered cars, such as passenger cars, dining cars, etc. ("Unpowered" may include incapable of self-propulsion and/or lacking on-board functionality for generating electricity.) For example, electrical power provided by the HEP alternator **118** may supply the lighting, HVAC, dining car kitchen, battery charging loads, and/or other hotel needs of connected rail cars. In another example, the unpowered cars use the electrical power provided by the HEP alternator for heating, lighting, ventilation, air conditioning, communication equipment, entertainment devices, fans, outlets/sockets, and/or kitchen equipment.

In some embodiments, the vehicle system is one of a plurality of vehicles coupled together and the HEP alternator provides power to some or all of the plurality of coupled vehicles. In one example, the vehicle system is a locomotive,

e.g., one of a plurality of locomotives in a consist. As another example, the vehicle system is a generator car, e.g., one of a plurality of generator cars in a consist. In such embodiments, a HEP load may be balanced between the vehicle system and the plurality of rail cars coupled to the vehicle system. In one example, the HEP load is balanced between the vehicle system and the plurality of rail cars to maintain a designated horse power (power rating) and/or a fuel consumption rate. In one example, the HEP load may be in a range from about 20 kW to more than 150 kW, or up to 560 kW. In other examples, the HEP load may have a voltage range from 800 V to 1000 V AC/DC two pole (**400** or **600** A), 1500 V AC two pole (**800** A) or at 415 V three-phase, 380 V three-phase, three-phase AC at 480 V, or switchable between voltages: e.g., 1,000 V AC 16⅔ Hz, 1,500 V AC 50 Hz, 1,500 V DC and 3,000 V DC. In one particular example, the HEP alternator supplies three-phase AC electrical power at 480 V and 60 Hz. In some embodiments, transformers may be fitted in each rail car to lower voltages for consumption by various onboard devices. The HEP alternator **118** and associated electronic components will be discussed in further detail below with reference to FIG. 2.

The auxiliary alternator **120** provides electrical power to one or more auxiliary components **124** of the engine system **106**. For example, an auxiliary component may include a radiator fan, an alternator blower, an inverter blower, a resistive grid blower, a cooling tower blower, or another component associated with operation of the engine system **106**.

An energy storage system **138** may be coupled to the electrical power generation unit **114**. The energy storage system **138** may be operable to receive power from any of the alternators in the electrical power generation unit and provide power to any of the power distribution systems associated with the alternators. In one example, the energy storage system **138** may be operable to receive power from the HEP alternator **118** when available, and provide power to an electrical component coupled to the HEP alternator when the HEP alternator does not provide power to the electrical component. In one example, the HEP alternator may not provide power to the electrical component because the power may be provided to traction motors or may be used elsewhere. For example, the electrical component may include one or more of the plurality of cars coupled to the HEP alternator, or an auxiliary blower or other component coupled to a HEP bus. It will be appreciated that energy storage system **138** may include a battery and/or another suitable power storage device.

In some embodiments, the traction motors **110** may have regenerative power producing capabilities, such as power produced during regenerative braking operations. As such, the vehicle system **100** may be configured to feed power produced during regenerative operation to the HEP system, under some conditions. In particular, regenerative power may be provided to the HEP bus to meet a HEP load.

In some embodiments, the vehicle system **100** includes a pantograph **140** that is coupled to an overhead power line **142**. The pantograph **140** collects power from the overhead power line **142** when available to be used for various operations. The pantograph **140** is coupled to the power generation unit **114** to provide power to the various power systems including the HEP system. In one example, the pantograph **140** is operable to provide power to a hotel load on a HEP bus when available. Further, the HEP alternator is operable to provide power to the hotel load when the pantograph does not provide power to the hotel load.

The controller **126** at least partially controls operation of the rail vehicle **100** and the engine system **106**. The controller

126 includes a microprocessor unit (e.g., a processor) **128** and an electronic storage medium (a.k.a., a computer-readable storage medium) **130**. For example, the computer-readable storage medium includes one or more of a read-only memory chip, random access memory, etc. The computer readable storage medium **130** holds instructions that when executed by the microprocessor unit **128** executes programs for controlling operation of the engine system **106** as well as methods discussed in further detail below with reference to FIG. 7. The controller **126**, while overseeing control and management of the vehicle system **100**, is configured to receive signals from a variety of engine sensors **132** in order to determine operating parameters and operating conditions, and correspondingly adjust various actuators **134** to control operation of the rail vehicle **100**.

In one embodiment, the controller **126** is configured to operate the engine to generate a torque output on the drive shaft coupled to the traction alternator and the HEP alternator. The controller **126** is further configured to vary a first excitation power provided to the traction alternator to provide a first output power to one or more traction motors based on an electrical load on the traction alternator and the torque output. The excitation power is provided by power electronics positioned external to the traction alternator. The controller **126** is further configured to excite the HEP alternator with a second excitation power to provide a second output power to one or more rail cars of the rail vehicle based on the torque output, wherein the excitation power is provided by a self-excited field winding positioned in the HEP alternator. In one example the output power provided by the HEP alternator to the rail cars is substantially constant.

In one embodiment, the controller **126** is configured to monitor a car-to-car integrity of a HEP power line (e.g., HEP power bus) and report if there is a short circuit or an indication of degradation of the HEP power line. In one embodiment, the sensors **132** may include a monitoring circuit, switch, or other device that is coupled to the HEP power line between the contactor **260** and each of the rail cars **136** (or another location). The monitoring circuit may detect occurrence of a short circuit between the contactor and the rail cars and correspondingly may send a signal to the controller **126** indicating the short circuit. Further, in one embodiment, the controller **126** is configured to provide an indication (e.g., audio or visual) to a vehicle operator in response to detection of the short circuit. In one embodiment, the controller **126** is configured to adjust operation based on detection of the short circuit. In one embodiment, the controller **126** is configured to shut off electrical components, such as appliances in the rail car where the short circuit was detected. In one embodiment, the controller **126** is configured to reroute power from another source or connection to the rail car where the short circuit was detected. A short circuit is one example, of various degradation conditions that may be detected by the controller **126**. A degradation condition includes a condition where the HEP power line does not provide power as commanded by the controller **126**.

In one embodiment, the controller **126** is configured to supplement power provided to the one or more traction motors by the traction alternator with power provided by the HEP alternator on demand. So, for example, the controller may be configured to control transfer of power from the HEP alternator to the one or more traction motors when, in a given time period, the traction alternator is unable to meet the total power demand of the one or more traction motors. In one embodiment, the controller **126** is configured to turn off one or more electrical components that receive power from the HEP alternator based on a designated hierarchy to provide

power to the one or more traction motors on demand. For example, the hierarchy may include turning off an oven first, followed by various other components, and emergency lights may be turned off last. That is, the hierarchy may include turning off non-critical loads first, and safety-critical loads last.

In one embodiment, the controller **126** is configured to control the HEP alternator to provide an amount of power to one or more unpowered cars coupled to the vehicle system based on engine load and/or an emission rate threshold. Under some conditions, power may be provided to the traction system in favor of the HEP system based on operating conditions. In one embodiment, when a rail vehicle is under high engine load, such as during a hill climb, the controller **126** is configured to divert power from the HEP system to the traction system in order to power the traction motors to propel the rail vehicle up the hill. In one embodiment, when a rail vehicle produces emissions at a rate above a threshold, such during operation in a tunnel, the controller **126** is configured to de-rate the engine system due based on the emissions rate. Further, the controller **126** is configured to diver power from the HEP system to the traction system in order to compensate for the engine de-rating and meet the engine load.

FIG. 2 shows a schematic diagram of an embodiment of a traction power circuit **200** and a HEP circuit **202**. In one example, the traction power circuit **200** corresponds to the traction alternator **116** and the HEP circuit **202** corresponds to the HEP alternator **118** in the electrical power generation unit **114** of the rail vehicle **100** shown in FIG. 1.

The traction power circuit **200** includes a traction alternator **204** (TRACALT) operable to produce three-phase alternating current (AC) electrical power. The AC power may be generated based on a torque output produced by the engine **108** (shown in FIG. 1) and/or a field current of the traction alternator **204**. The field current is an electric current that is applied to one or more field windings **230** that are powered by externally positioned power electronics **226**. Externally positioned means that the power electronics are not in the traction alternator or are separate from the traction alternator. The field current provided by the power electronics **226** generates a magnetic field or flux of the traction alternator **204**. A rotor of the traction alternator **204** rotates within the magnetic field to generate the electrical power (e.g., current and/or voltage) that is output from the traction alternator **204**.

The traction alternator **204** is coupled to a rectifier **206** that is operable to convert the AC power into direct current (DC) electrical power. The DC power output by the rectifier **206** is provided to various electrical components through a traction bus **208**. An electrical load **210** is coupled to the traction bus **208** by a switch **212** that allows the electrical load to be disconnected from the traction bus **208** based on operating conditions of the rail vehicle. The electrical load **210** is representative of different components that apply electrical loads to the traction bus **208** that vary throughout operation of the rail vehicle. For example, the electrical load **210** may include one or more of dynamic brakes, resistive grids, engine blowers, and other electrical components that provide or consume electrical power on the traction bus **208**. The various electric loads described herein are not intended to be all encompassing or exclusive, as additional components may be included.

A plurality of traction inverters (INV1-INV4) **214** is coupled to the traction bus **208**. The plurality of traction inverters **214** may be configured to modify the electrical power received from the traction bus **208** to a suitable form to be provided to a plurality of traction motors (TM1-TM4) **216**.

In particular, the plurality of inverters **214** convert DC power to AC power, among other modifications, to drive the plurality of traction motors **216**.

A crank transfer switch **218** (SW) is positioned between inverters **INV3** and **INV4** and traction motors **TM3** and **TM4** to control the supply of current to the traction motors during propulsion of the rail vehicle and to supply the traction alternator **204** with current during startup to crank the engine.

A plurality of auxiliary inverters (**AUXINV1**-**AUXINV4**) **220** is coupled to the traction bus **208**. The plurality of auxiliary inverters **220** may be configured to modify the electrical power received from the traction bus **208** to a suitable form to be provided to a plurality of auxiliary components **222**. For example, the auxiliary inverters **AUXINV1** and **AUXINV4** convert the DC power of the traction bus **208** into AC power that is delivered to filters **224**. The filters **224** attenuate high voltages above a predetermined level that permit the use of random wound motors (e.g., induction or otherwise) to power the auxiliary components. Without such filters, high voltages generated by the auxiliary inverter switching in combination with long cable lengths could damage the random wound motor insulation. The AC power that is output from the filters **224** is delivered to radiator fans **RF1** and **RF2** that blow air to cool a radiator or other component of the engine **108** (shown in FIG. 1).

Furthermore, the auxiliary inverter **AUXINV2** provides AC power to a blower **BLWR** that blows air to cool the traction alternator and the plurality of inverters coupled to the traction bus **208**. It will be appreciated that additional inverters, filters, and/or other propulsion electric loads may be joined to the traction bus to draw current from the traction bus. For example, the additional electric loads may be fans, blowers, compressors, electronic devices, traction motors, and the like.

Power electronics **226** are disposed between the traction bus **208** and field windings **230** of the traction alternator **204**. The power electronics **226** include a dual H-bridge **228** (DH-BRIDGE) that is coupled to a field isolation transformer (**FIT**) **233** and a battery isolation transformer (**BIT**) **234**. The **FIT** **232** and the **BIT** **234** isolate the dual H-bridge **228** from the field windings **230** and a battery **238**. The **FIT** **232** and the **BIT** **234** are coupled to a power rectifier panel (**PRP**) **236**. The **FIT** **232** provides electrical power to the field windings **230**. The **BIT** **234** provides electrical power to the battery **238**. The battery **238** may receive and store electric current from the traction bus **208**. The battery **238** also may deliver electric current through the traction bus **208** when the traction alternator **204** does not generate current. For example, the battery **238** may supply electric current when the engine **108** (shown in FIG. 1) is turned off or deactivated.

The dual H-bridge **228** controls the field current that is supplied to the field windings **230** of the traction alternator **204** through the **FIT** **232** to control an excitation power level provided to the traction alternator. For example, the dual H-bridge **228** may increase the voltage applied to the field windings **230** to increase the magnetic field created by the field windings **230** and the voltage that is output from the traction alternator **204**. Likewise the dual H-bridge **228** may decrease the voltage supplied to the field windings **230** to decrease the output voltage of the traction alternator **204**. The dual H-bridge **228** is operable to vary the voltage that is delivered to the field windings **230** based on the load on the traction bus **208** and the torque output of the engine **108** (shown in FIG. 1), among other parameters. For example, the dual H-bridge **228** may increase the voltage of the field current when the engine **108** slows down to meet the load on the traction bus and may decrease the voltage of the field current

when the engine **108** speeds up to meet the load on the traction bus. In some embodiments, the engine **108** may be operated at a substantially constant speed or to provide a substantially constant torque output. Accordingly, the dual H-bridge **228** may vary the voltage of the field current as the load on the traction bus **208** varies.

Due to the variance in load (e.g., from the traction motors) on the traction bus **208** at any given time, the traction bus **208** may have a large voltage range capability. For example, the voltage on the traction bus may range from 330V-1400V throughout operation of the rail vehicle. Moreover, the power electronics **226** are configured to control vary the voltage provided to the field windings **230** to control the traction alternator to output electrical power to meet the voltage range of the traction bus.

The HEP circuit **202** includes a HEP alternator **240** (HEP ALT) operable to produce three-phase AC electrical power to one or more rail cars **136** of the rail vehicle **100**. The AC power may be generated based on a torque output produced by the engine **108** (shown in FIG. 1) and/or a field current of the HEP alternator **240**. The field current is an electric current that provided by one or more excitation field windings **242** positioned in the HEP alternator **240** in what may be referred to as self excitation. Power output from a rotor of the HEP alternator **240** is used to power the excitation field windings **242** in the HEP alternator **240**. In some embodiments, an alternator protection panel **266** (HTAP) is coupled to the field windings **242**. The alternator protection panel **266** protects the HEP alternator **240** against power overload in case of a rectifier or diode failure in the HEP system.

The excitation field windings **242** may take various forms that are capable of self excitation from within the HEP alternator. Examples of excitation field windings used for self-excitation of the HEP alternator will be discussed in further detail below with reference to FIGS. 3-6.

In the illustrated embodiment, since the HEP alternator **240** is self excited, the HEP alternator does not receive electrical power from permanent magnets, and/or external power electronics for excitation. However, it will be appreciated that in some embodiments the HEP circuit **202** may include such components. For example, the HEP alternator may be initially flashed with a battery to start the self excitation process, and then the battery may be disconnected during HEP system operation.

A HEP alternator controller (**HAC**) **244** is coupled to the HEP alternator **240**. The **HAC** **244** is configured to vary voltage provided to the field windings **242** once the HEP alternator has been excited to full voltage based on voltage feedback (**VFB**) output from the HEP alternator **240**. The **HAC** **244** varies voltage to the excitation field winding **242** so that the HEP alternator **240** outputs substantially constant voltage for distribution to the rail cars. Relative to the external power electronics **226** that control the traction alternator **204**, the **HAC** **244** provides less complex feedback control. Moreover, the **HAC** **244** is less expensive, weighs less, and does not require as much cooling resources as the power electronics **226**. The HEP alternator **240** may be controlled by the **HAC** instead of the larger and more expensive power electronics **226** of the traction power circuit **200**, because the HEP alternator **240** is self excited and outputs a substantially constant voltage that is distributed through a HEP bus **252** that has a voltage range that is less than the voltage range of the traction bus **208**.

The HEP alternator **240** is coupled to a rectifier **250** that is operable to convert the AC power into DC power that is provided to various electrical components through the HEP bus **252**. A plurality of HEP inverters (**INV5**-**INV6**) **254** is

coupled to the HEP bus 252. The plurality of HEP inverters 254 may be configured to modify the electrical power received from the HEP bus 252 to a suitable form to be provided to the rail cars 136 of the rail vehicle 100. In particular, the plurality of inverters 254 converts DC power to AC power, among other modifications. A HEP transfer switch 256 (HEP SW) is positioned between inverters INV5 and INV6 to control the supply of current to the rail cars 136 of the rail vehicle 100. A HEP filter 258 is coupled to the HEP transfer switch 256. The HEP filter 258 reduces current that does not have a predetermined frequency or a frequency that falls outside a predetermined range of frequencies. For example, the HEP filter 258 may filter out non-60 Hz components or harmonics of the AC power that is output from the switch 256. The AC power output from the HEP filter 258 is distributed to the rail cars 136 through a HEP contactor 260 (HEPC). In one example, the AC power is supplied to the rail cars 136 as three-phase AC at 480 volts and 60 Hz.

A plurality of HEP auxiliary inverters (HAUXINV1 and HAUXINV2) 262 is coupled to the HEP bus 252. The plurality of HEP auxiliary inverters 262 may be configured to modify the electrical power received from the HEP bus 252 to a suitable form to be provided to a plurality of auxiliary components 264. For example, the auxiliary inverters HAUXINV1 and HAUXINV2 convert the DC power of the HEP bus 252 into AC power that is delivered to blowers for cooling the traction motors and the HEP alternator. It will be appreciated that additional inverters, filters, and/or other electric loads may be joined to the HEP bus to draw current from the HEP bus. For example, the additional electric loads may be fans, blowers, compressors, electronic devices, and the like.

FIGS. 3-6 show different embodiments of a self-excited HEP alternator that may be employed in the HEP circuit 202 shown in FIG. 2. FIG. 3 shows a HEP alternator 300 including a three phase output winding 302 that provides electrical power output from the HEP alternator 300. The HEP alternator 300 further includes a three-phase exciter winding 304 that is physically separate from the three-phase output winding 302. The exciter winding 304 may be wrapped along with the output winding 302 around the stator in the HEP alternator 300 such that the output winding 302 and the exciter winding 304 receive the same flux. The exciter winding provides three-phase voltage to a phase control rectifier 306. The rectifier 306 provides a field voltage to generate a field current in the HEP alternator 300 to make it self-excited.

FIG. 4 shows a HEP alternator 400 including a three phase output winding 402 that provides electrical power output from the HEP alternator 400. Further, a portion 404 of the output winding 402 acts as an exciter field winding. In particular, the portion 404 of the output winding 402 is tapped to provide an excitation power level that is less than an output power level of the HEP alternator 400. The portion 404 of the output winding 402 that acts as the exciter winding provides three-phase excitation voltage or field voltage (ALT FIELD) to a phase control rectifier 406. The rectifier 406 provides field voltage to generate a field current in the HEP alternator 400 to make it self-excited. In one example, the portion 404 of the output winding 402 that is tapped to provide the field voltage is $\frac{1}{3}$ of the output winding 402. In another example, the portion 404 of the output winding 402 that is tapped to provide the field voltage is $\frac{1}{6}$ of the output winding 402. It will be appreciated that any suitable portion of the output winding may be tapped to provide an appropriate field voltage for self excitation.

FIG. 5 shows a HEP alternator 500 including a three phase output winding 502 that provides electrical power output

from the HEP alternator 500. Further, the output winding 402 acts as the exciter winding by providing three-phase excitation voltage or field voltage (ALT FIELD) to a phase control rectifier 504. The rectifier provides a field voltage to a transformer 506. The transformer 506 is operable to modify the field voltage from the rectifier 504 to generate a field current in the HEP alternator 500 to make it self-excited. In other words, the transformer 506 provides an excitation power level that is less than an output power level of the HEP alternator 500 to the HEP alternator 500 for self excitation.

FIG. 6 shows a HEP alternator 600 including a three phase output winding 602 that provides electrical power output from the HEP alternator 600. The HEP alternator 600 further includes a single-phase exciter winding 604 that is physically separate from the three-phase output winding 602. The exciter winding 604 may be wrapped along with the output winding 602 around the stator in the HEP alternator 600 such that the output winding 602 and the exciter winding 604 receive the same flux. The exciter winding provides single-phase excitation voltage or field voltage (ALT FIELD) to a phase control rectifier 606. The rectifier 606 provides a field voltage to generate a field current in the HEP alternator 600 to make it self-excited.

FIG. 7 shows a flow chart of an embodiment of a method 700 for generating power in a rail vehicle. In one example, the method 700 is executed by the controller 126 in FIG. 1, and more particularly the dual H-bridge 228 and the HAC 244 shown in FIG. 2. At 702, the method 700 includes operating an engine to generate a torque output on a drive shaft coupled to a traction alternator and a HEP alternator. In some embodiments, the method includes maintaining a substantially constant torque output on the drive shaft provided by the engine.

At 704, the method 700 includes varying a first excitation power provided to the traction alternator to provide a first output power to one or more traction motors based on an electrical load on the traction alternator and the torque output. The excitation power is provided by power electronics positioned external to the traction alternator. In one example, the power electronics include a dual H-bridge coupled to a field isolation transformer that provides power to a field winding of the traction alternator. For example, the load on the traction alternator may be based on the amount of power consumed by electrical components coupled to a traction bus to which the traction alternator provides output power.

At 706, the method 700 includes exciting the HEP alternator with a second excitation power to provide a second output power to one or more rail cars of the rail vehicle based on the torque output. The excitation power is provided by a self-excited field winding positioned in the HEP alternator. In some embodiments, the method includes maintaining a substantially constant output power provided by the HEP alternator to the rail cars.

By employing a self-excited HEP alternator, external power electronics that would otherwise be required to excite the alternator may be eliminated from the rail vehicle, in one example. For example, the HEP alternator may not receive electrical power from a battery for excitation. As another example, the HEP alternator may not receive electrical power from permanent magnets for excitation. In this way, the HEP alternator may be made more compact and light weight relative to a configuration where a HEP alternator is excited by external power electronics.

As used herein, an element or step recited in the singular and proceeded with the word "a" or "an" should be understood as not excluding plural of said elements or steps, unless such exclusion is explicitly stated. Furthermore, references to "one embodiment" of the present invention are not intended

11

to be interpreted as excluding the existence of additional embodiments that also incorporate the recited features. Moreover, unless explicitly stated to the contrary, embodiments “comprising,” “including,” or “having” an element or a plurality of elements having a particular property may include additional such elements not having that property. The terms “including” and “in which” are used as the plain-language equivalents of the respective terms “comprising” and “wherein.” Moreover, the terms “first,” “second,” and “third,” etc. are used merely as labels, and are not intended to impose numerical requirements or a particular positional order on their objects.

This written description uses examples to disclose the invention, including the best mode, and also to enable a person of ordinary skill in the relevant art to practice the invention, including making and using any devices or systems and performing any incorporated methods. The patentable scope of the invention is defined by the claims, and may include other examples that occur to those of ordinary skill in the art. Such other examples are intended to be within the scope of the claims if they have structural elements that do not differ from the literal language of the claims, or if they include equivalent structural elements with insubstantial differences from the literal languages of the claims.

The invention claimed is:

1. A vehicle system, comprising:
an electrical power generation unit operatively coupled with at least one drive shaft of an engine system, the electrical power generation unit comprising:
a traction alternator excited by power electronics positioned external to the traction alternator, the power electronics including a field isolation transformer and a dual H-bridge coupled to the field isolation transformer to control an excitation power level provided to the traction alternator; and
a head-end-power (HEP) alternator, wherein the HEP alternator is self-excited by an exciter winding positioned in the HEP alternator.
2. The vehicle system of claim 1, further comprising:
one or more traction motors, wherein the traction alternator is coupled to a first drive shaft of the at least one drive shaft, and wherein the traction alternator is operable to provide electrical power to the one or more traction motors to propel the vehicle system.
3. The vehicle system of claim 2, wherein the HEP alternator is coupled to the first drive shaft, and wherein the HEP alternator is operable to provide electrical power to one or more unpowered cars coupled to the vehicle system.
4. The vehicle system of claim 3, wherein the traction alternator is operable to provide electrical power to the one or more traction motors through a first traction bus having a first voltage range and the HEP alternator is operable to provide electrical power to the one or more unpowered cars through a second traction bus that has a second voltage range that is less than the first voltage range.
5. The vehicle system of claim 4, wherein the unpowered cars are operative to use the electrical power for one or more of heating, lighting, ventilation, air conditioning, communication equipment, entertainment devices, fans, outlets/sockets, or kitchen equipment.
6. The vehicle system of claim 3, further comprising:
a controller configured to monitor a car-to-car integrity of a HEP power line and report if there is a short circuit or an indication of degradation of the HEP power line.

12

7. The vehicle system of claim 2, further comprising:
a controller configured to supplement power provided to the one or more traction motors by the traction alternator with power provided by the HEP alternator on demand.
8. The vehicle system of claim 7, wherein the controller is configured to turn off one or more electrical components that receive power from the HEP alternator based on a designated hierarchy to provide power to the one or more traction motors on demand.
9. The vehicle system of claim 1, further comprising:
a pantograph operable to provide power to a hotel load when available, and wherein the HEP alternator is operable to provide power to the hotel load when the pantograph does not provide power to the hotel load.
10. The vehicle system of claim 1, wherein the electrical power generation unit further comprises an auxiliary alternator coupled to the drive shaft, and wherein the auxiliary alternator is operable to provide power to an auxiliary component of the vehicle system.
11. The vehicle system of claim 1, further comprising:
an energy storage system operable to receive power from the HEP alternator when available, and provide power to an electrical component when the HEP alternator does not provide power to the electrical component.
12. The vehicle system of claim 1, further comprising:
a controller configured to control the HEP alternator to provide an amount of power to one or more unpowered cars coupled to the vehicle system based on engine load and an emission rate threshold.
13. The vehicle system of claim 1, further comprising:
a controller configured to balance an HEP load between the vehicle system and a plurality of rail cars coupled to the vehicle system to maintain a designated horse power and/or a fuel consumption rate.
14. The vehicle system of claim 1, wherein the exciter winding is a portion of a three-phase output winding that provides electrical power output from the HEP alternator, wherein the portion of the three-phase output winding is tapped to provide an excitation power level that is less than an output power level of the HEP alternator.
15. The vehicle system of claim 1, wherein the exciter winding includes a three-phase output winding that provides electrical power output from the HEP alternator, wherein the three-phase output winding is coupled to a transformer that is operable to provide an excitation power level that is less than an output power level of the HEP alternator.
16. The vehicle system of claim 1, wherein the dual H-bridge is further coupled to a battery isolation transformer to control a power level provided to a battery coupled to the battery isolation transformer.
17. A vehicle system, comprising:
an electrical power generation unit operatively coupled with at least one drive shaft of an engine system, the electrical power generation unit comprising:
a traction alternator excited by power electronics positioned external to the traction alternator; and
a head-end-power (HEP) alternator, wherein the HEP alternator is self-excited by an exciter winding positioned in the HEP alternator, the exciter winding comprising one or more exciter windings that are physically separate from a three-phase output winding that provides electrical power output from the HEP alternator.
18. The vehicle system of claim 17, wherein the one or more exciter windings and the three-phase output winding are wrapped around a stator in the HEP alternator, and wherein the one or more exciter windings provide a voltage to a

13

rectifier, the rectifier providing a field voltage to generate a field current in the HEP alternator.

19. A rail vehicle system, comprising:

an electrical power generation unit operatively coupled with a drive shaft of an engine, the electrical power generation unit comprising:

a traction alternator coupled to the drive shaft, the traction alternator being operable to provide electrical power for one or more traction motors to propel the rail vehicle system, wherein the traction alternator is excited by a field isolation transformer that is controlled by a dual H-bridge to vary an excitation power level provided to the traction alternator; and

a head-end-power (HEP) alternator coupled to the drive shaft, the HEP alternator being operable to provide electrical power to one or more rail cars of the rail vehicle system, wherein the HEP alternator is self-excited by an exciter winding positioned in the HEP alternator.

14

20. A method comprising:

operating an engine in a rail vehicle to generate a torque output on a drive shaft coupled to a traction alternator and a head-end-power (HEP) alternator;

varying a first excitation power provided to the traction alternator to provide a first output power to one or more traction motors based on an electrical load on the traction alternator and the torque output, wherein the first excitation power is provided by power electronics positioned external to the traction alternator; and

exciting the HEP alternator with a second excitation power to provide a second output power to one or more additional rail vehicles coupled to the rail vehicle based on the torque output, wherein the second excitation power is provided by a self-excited field winding positioned in the HEP alternator.

* * * * *